

Good afternoon Representative Willis and Senator Bartolomeo,

I am here before you to express my support for S.B. 398 as I strongly believe that undocumented students should be granted the equal opportunities that all other Connecticut residents have in accessing financial aid for higher education. Through my role as a regional leader of Connecticut Students for a Dream, I have worked with and become friends with many undocumented students of all ages and ethnicities. Speaking on behalf of these bright and dedicated students, they are simply requesting that you and the rest of the state give them a chance.

Undocumented students grow up with the American dream of attending higher education in order to enter the competitive workforce and secure financial stability. Many times, they do not know or understand the significance of their undocumented status until they reach high school and begin exploring their dream of attending college upon graduation. Throughout primary and secondary education, many of these students are encouraged and empowered to work their hardest; they are attending school each day with the mentality that if they put forth effort and receive good grades, they can achieve the same success of continuing to further their education as their classmates.

Once these students are faced with the decision to attend college or search for employment, they become overwhelmed with the weight of this choice and the many barriers they face in achieving this goal, especially the cost of higher education. In addition, due to lack of information, undocumented students are often told that they cannot legally attend college or cannot apply for scholarships. Due to the mixed messages that they receive, they often withdraw from their goals of higher education. This greatly impacts their feelings of self-worth and their ability to live their life positively. One of my friends was told to not take the SAT's because the school administrator said he would not be going to college; he is much older now and is currently attending school with the help of friends and community members.

However, I feel that undocumented students, who are frequently low-income and in minority ethnic groups, should be granted equal opportunity to apply for financial aid as other low-income, minority students. Leveling the playing field will not only open up opportunities for individual students to achieve their goals but it will also transform the way in which the system of higher education is perceived by our community. This systemic change will begin to challenge the stigma of being an undocumented student and will ease the process of educating teachers and administrators within the state's education system. The state of Connecticut invests about \$16,000 per undocumented student through their primary and secondary public education and cannot currently receive a return investment. It makes fiscal and strategic sense to provide a clear pathway for undocumented students to continue on to higher education, enter the workforce, and be able to contribute to the state's tax revenue. Therefore, I am requesting your support of this legislation as it is the clear step towards providing hope for undocumented students of Connecticut. Thank you.

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